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# UR CABLE STATION IN MID-PACIFIC

BY DR. MARTIN CROOK, OF COLUMBUS, GEORGIA.

On April 9 and 10 of last year the cable ships Anglia and Colonia sailed from London to Manila via Suez canal for the purpose of laying the Commercial Pacific cable. Most people are aware that this cable now stretches from San Francisco to Manila, having three intermediate stations, Honolulu, Midway and Guam. Without entering into the details of the laving of the cable, one of the greatest enterprises of the kind that the world has ever known, it is the purpose of the writer to give an account of the life of the cable colony at Midway Island before and after the arrival of the above mentioned ships, and, in addition to this, a brief description of the island itself, which possesses a unique interest for the people of the United States.

It was on the morning of April 29 of last year that fifteen operators of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company stood on the decks of the chartered steamer Hanalei, viewing a faint white line along the northern horizon. It is no wonder that these men were out of their bunks at daylight straining their eyes to catch a glimpse of that almost inperceptible stretch of sand; no wonder that they had rushed from their cabins half clad and with uncombed hair. The captain of the ship had just reported that Midway Island was in year it was not surprising to see so much interest manifested.

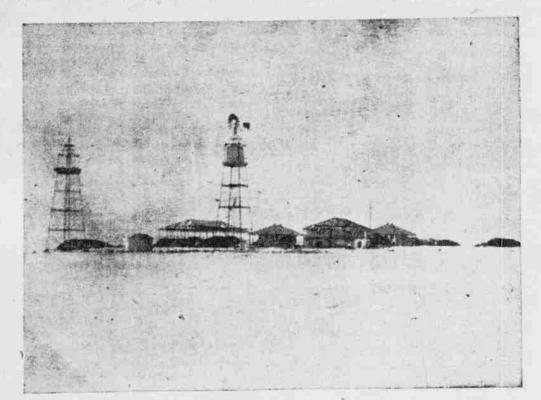
The Hanalei anchored two and one-half miles to the westward of the island and the superintendent of the station went ashore at once and selected a suitable site for the temporary buildings. Lumber was then loaded and work was begun on these buildings in order to have everything ready for the arrival of the Anglia and

Colonia, these ships being expected about June 15. But before we proceed any farther let us get an idea of the location of the islands forming the Midway group. For those whose maps have not been magnified to the extent of showing every visible speck of land in the northern Pacific, it may be well to say that this group of islands is found twelve hundred miles northwest of Honolulu and in about the same latitude as Galveston, Texas. The name "Midway" was given to them because at the time of their discovery by Captain Brooks in 1859 they were supposed to be halfway around the earth from Greenwich, but it is now known that they lie about two and one-half degrees from the one hundred and eightieth meridian.

There are two islands in the group; one called Sand or Western Island, the other Eastern Island. Between the two is a mere islet known as Middlebrook. There are no natives on any of them. They are owned by the United States and fall under the jurisdiction of the navy.

As Sand Island is the home of the staff of operators through whose hands messages to and from all parts of the world pass daily, it naturally attracts most of our attention. It is here that four opera-

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#### CABLE BUILDINGS IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION.

tors transmit most of the messages to our newspapers concerning the Russo-Japanese War; it is on this heap of sand, a mile and a half in length and three-quarters of a mile in width, that the Commercial Pacific Cable Company has established a transmitting station through which the United States government messages pass to Manila and other points in the Far East.

Sand Island is an almost verdureless waste of coral sand. An occasional sand dune covered with a few short, sickly-looking shrubs may be seen and at two places coarse grass and shrubs are found, but these are very limited in extent. With these exceptions the island is as barren as the Desert of Sahara: it is absolutely without

Since Midway is in mid-ocean, it is interesting to note that while one sand heap is forty-three feet in height, the place where the temperary buildings stand is only about eight feet above the sea. But Nature has erected a coral reef around the islands, and this reef, fifteen miles in circumference, five feet high, and from twenty to twenty-five feet in width, forms a perfect protection against the waves of the mighty Pacific. Were it not for this reef Sand Island could never have been utilized as a cable station.

The glare of the sun upon the sand is fearful in its intensity. necessitating the constant use of goggles as a protection to the eves -the glare is more intense than that of snow. Some of the men failed to use the goggles and I believe that their eyes are permanently

As soon as the tent was pitched a well was sunk four and onehalf feet in depth and it was astonishing to find fresh water which at first was milky-white in color, but which upon standing became as clear and as palatable as any water in the world. It is astonishing that it was not brackish, but that fresh water could be obtained anywhere on the island was an exceedingly pleasant surprise to the little body of men.

There are at least twenty-five varieties of sea-birds at Midway Most of them are so gentle that they may be picked up and held in the hand without the least difficulty. An albatross laid her egg on one of the golf tees, and she seemed so contented there that it was thought best to move the tee to another place; but even then the birds were so gentle and so numerous that they would be struck with the balls. This occurred more than once and one bird was killed in that way.

The terns, or sea-gallows, are most numerous and their eggs. being edible, are eaten in large quantities. It is a peculiarity of the sca-birds to lay only one egg in a season. Only two varieties of those at Midway have nests; the others lay their eggs on the

bare sand. There are several birds of rare plumage, and when the Hanale



### HIGHEST POINT OF MIDWAY ISLAND.

arrived there were thirty-nine Japanese on Sand Island. These Japanese were slaughtering the pretty, innocent birds in large numbers. Sugar Factors and Commission Agents The feathers of the birds were shipped to Yokohama on a schooner then anchored about half a mile from shore.

Fish of many varieties are found near the reef and are so easily caught that there is no sport in fishing. Turtles are occasionally caught but are rather small. Sharks are numerous, but fortunately do not come near the beach; consequently they do not interfere with swimming, a favorite pastime of the people at Midway.

On June 3 Lieutenant Commander Rodman, U. S. N., who had been appointed governor of Midway, arrived on the U.S.S. Iroquois. It was at this time that the first mail bag was received, the islanders having been without mail for a month and a half.

When Captain Rodman came ashore the superintendent of the station reported that the Japanese were slaughtering the birds in large numbers and the bodies of these birds, left upon the sand to decay, were producing an almost intolerable stench; were causing the house flies to multiply rapidly; and lastly, but most important, the decaying bodies would sooner or later contaminate the water supply. Captain Rodman firmly but politely informed the Japanese that they must leave the island, which they did shortly afterward

On June 16 the Anglia was sighted, and on the eighteenth the Colonia. The former laid the cable from Manila to Guam, the latter the Guam-Midway section, and now the Anglia was ready to lay the section between Midway and Honolulu. The part of the cable between Honolulu and San Francisco was completed in December, 1902. The Anglia reached Honolulu on July 3 of last year, thus completing the long stretch across the Pacific, which required more than 8,000 miles of cable. On July 4 President Roosevelt formally opened the cable by sending the first message, which was to Governor Taft at Manila.

After this the operators settled down to business and the news of the world was known at Midway before it was printed in the newspapers. This fact alone was a great help to these men when, at a later date, the Winter storms set in and they suffered both in mind and body, because it was impossible to land mail and provisions. Everything was done by the officials at New York to make it as pleasant and as comfortable as possible for those at Midway, but the little colony seemed to have a series of misfortanes during their first year's stay.

During October last it became necessary to order a new supply of provisions, and the schooner Julia E. Whalen was sent from Honolulu with six months supply and the mail which had been in the postoffice at Honolulu for a month. The Whalen on the night of her arrival (October 22) struck the north reef and was wrecked. Her cargo was all lost, including two large bags of mail. No lives were lost, but how it was possible for the crew to lower a boat and | get safely out of those immense breakers (a three-days gale had been | blowing) is a mystery which I hardly think the captain can unravel.

As soon as possible the Iroquois came to bring provisions for \ the islanders and to take the Whalen's crew to Honolulu. When she arrived the supply was quite low. She remained only twenty-

When the Winter gales set in the sand began to drift. At times it would be blown through the air at the rate of thirty miles an hour. It was so disagreeable to have the sand blown in their eyes, ears and noses and often cutting their faces, that most of the men preferred remaining in their rooms day and night. And even in these rooms with all windows and doors shut they were not rid of the sand, for it would drift through every crack and crevice.

During the Winter months the atmosphere is usually quite humid, and when the rooms became damp they remained so. And if anyone wants to see a gloomy, lonely, desolate picture, let him stand in one of those damp rooms with the temperature at fifty-two degrees (that was the minimum for last year) and look out over this desert island during a gale, while the sand is being driven in perfect clouds across the view and in the distance the waves with an awful roar are breaking in masses of spray up on the reef.

The men sent to Midway were selected because of their social and equable dispositions, because they would make the best of their environment. Through all this they were happy and contented they had expected these things from the start. But at a later date the conditions became more serious. It was on the third day of last January, after a quiet and uneventful Christmas and New Year's day on the island, that the cruisers New Orleans (flagship). (Continued on Page 6.)

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